

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

BOOK 2 / AGES 4 — 5







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This Series

This series is about you and your child with disabilities. Throughout the series, we will use the word parent to identify the adult(s) caring for a child with disabilities - even though, many times, that person may be a grandparent, foster parent or other relative. We know there are all kinds of parents and families.

Too often as a parent or caregiver, we all feel overwhelmed. As the parent of a child with disabilities, you probably have additional concerns. This series was developed with parents to help you understand some of the special issues you may face. Throughout the series, you will find exercises, examples, and success stories that may help you understand how to help your child be as independent as possible.

Each booklet is based on your child's age and covers 6 important areas: Community Involvement, Independence, Health & Wellness, Finance, Employment Skills and Self-Advocacy.



Special Advice for Parents of Children with Disabilities

Your child may be ahead in some areas and need more specialized work in others. Since this series is designed to help children with all types of disabilities, your child may have excellent verbal skills but poor mobility – or in the case of autism, great mobility but poor interaction with others. Use the suggestions as a guide to think about the areas of development that you need to stress.

Your child's disability may make it difficult to follow all the suggestions in this booklet. But just because something may be harder than usual for you or your child, doesn't mean you should give up. **Our goal is to help guide you in raising a strong, independent, well-adjusted child who happens to have a disability.** As you come to a crossroads, ask yourself, "Is this something my child will need to be able to do in the future?" If you say yes, then how can you adapt the situation so your child can be successful?





Envisioning the Future - Thinking About School

It's time to start thinking about how your child will be able to perform well in school. Preparing your child to do well in school starts now. Important behaviors, like raising your hand to speak, sitting quietly and reading, playing well with other children and following instructions are things that can be practiced now to ease your child's transition into school.



This chart may be able to help. In each area, check the box if your child does well in this area or if your child needs some improvement. If you're unsure how your child would rate in each area, talk this over with your doctor or specialist. If your child needs help in an area, write down the local resource you could use and the contact information. The sooner your child gets help in an area, the more progress you will be able to see.

Age Appropriate Skill	My Child Does Well	My Child Needs Improvement	Where Will We Get Help?
Speech			
Mobility (moves on own to explore, climb, jump, etc.)			
Concentration/ Attentiveness (can focus long enough to finish a task)			
Interaction with other children (plays, talks, spends time with)			
Interaction with other adults (plays, talks, spends time with)			
Following Instructions			
Vision/Hearing			
Diet/Nutrition			
Other			

“Children are not the same but they should have the same opportunities.”

Emotional Support / Community Involvement

For you:

Pre-schoolers live in a world filled with mixed feelings. They want to mimic your behaviors and still be viewed as independent. They want to be shown how to do something but then left alone to try it for themselves. This can be a challenging time for you as a parent. One minute your child will demand your full attention, the next be off on their own, rejecting any adult involvement. Your child may begin to tell lies, have imaginary friends and make up stories.

Because pre-schoolers don't hide their emotions, you will be very aware of what they like and don't like. Extremes are common, like "I LOVE this" and "I HATE that", but their emotions are usually short-lived. Your child needs to know that there are clear and consistent rules in your household and what the consequences for breaking them are. Work with other adults and older siblings to be sure your child receives a message of consistent boundaries and loving support.

For your child:

Your child may begin to enjoy dramatic play with other children. Learning to play with others and share may be the basis for lifelong friendships. Acting-out physically can become a problem and your child needs to be encouraged to express their feelings with words. A sense of stability is extremely important. As your child begins to identify separately from you, your child will also want to understand where they 'fit' into the family.

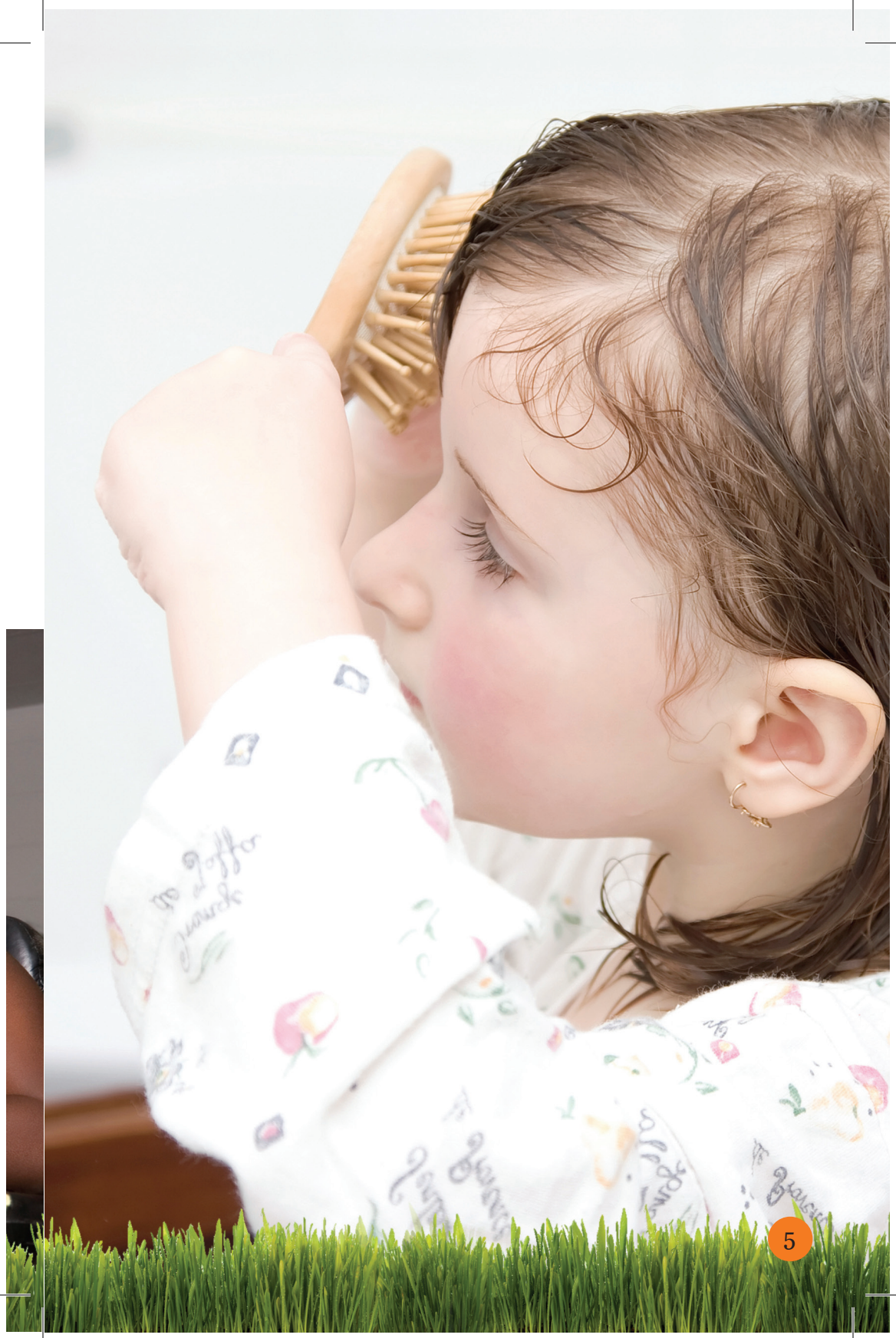


Independence / Self-Care

Begin setting expectations for self-reliance. Now is the best time to begin reinforcing self-care habits. Set standards for your child such as: dirty dishes in the sink, clothes in the hamper, wet towels on the rack, etc. Not only will this make your life a little easier, but your child begins to accept responsibility for self-care and being part of the family. Let your child practice dressing, hair-brushing, and other grooming, as much as appropriate for your child's skill level.

Support creative outlets for your child in no-fail situations. Let your child try new things like sculpting with clay, drawing, and making music. Explore assistive devices and technology that can increase your child's independence (for example, communication devices, adaptive toys, adaptive keyboards, etc.), if needed.





Health & Wellness

This is the time to begin lifelong habits of good nutrition and exercise habits. Your child may begin to express likes/dislikes for food. Sometimes these are real feelings but often your child is mimicking an older sibling or friend. Encourage your child to try new foods and new activities.

Pre-schoolers are naturally energetic and enthusiastic about physical activity and exploration. Use this to create excitement for your child about the outside world. Family activities that encourage motion and physical activity will encourage both physical development and socialization.

You may begin to feel like this parent as your child begins exploring:

“For his first two years, all I wanted was for him to walk and talk - now I just want him to sit down and shut up”.





Finances

Allow your child to begin to handle money. Start a small savings account or get a piggy bank. Encourage your child to save and spend money on special purchases. Have your child interact with store personnel – asking for what they want, choosing the size, color, price, etc. Choose quiet times at the store and allow your child, with your oversight, to pay for the item and get change. This gives your child practice making purchases and interacting with adults in their work settings.

Employment Skills

Very often your child with a disability has become the center of attention for the family due to medical or behavior issues. Though this may have been necessary, it's also important to focus on your child as part of the family – not the center of your attention. Include your child as part of family activities – raking leaves, baking cookies, doing dishes – it's important for your child to begin working with others to succeed. You may have to adapt activities so your child can participate. As much as

“Our friends thought we were crazy when we included our son in activities like gardening. I hooked a hose to his wheelchair and he drove around the yard watering the plants - and thoroughly enjoying himself”

possible, give your child control over one part of the process. For example with raking leaves, your child might open the yard bags and set them up for you to fill. This way they are part of the process, taking responsibility for their part and seeing how they fit as part of a team.





Self-Advocacy

Continue to reinforce reasons for your child's wants. When your child says "I want —", have them tell you why. As they develop reasons for their desires, they also begin developing advocacy skills by learning to speak for their ideas and make solid discussion points. Begin talking about cause-and-effect relationships with their wants and choices – "I know you want three candy bars but if you eat three, you won't be able to eat dinner. How about one?" Have your child begin making structured decisions for themselves, like "Do you want a hamburger or a hot dog for lunch?" Too many choices confuse younger children. If possible, begin letting your child order their own food in a restaurant.

Remember that children model adult behavior. Your child is likely to become the same type of advocate for their own needs that they see from you. When you speak up for your child's needs, you are also teaching them how to react appropriately to get what they need.

Great Expectations Series:

Book 1 - Age 0 to 3

Book 2 - Pre-school

Book 3 - Grade School

Book 4 - High School & Beyond

Additional web resources including community supports and disability-specific organizations to support parents of children with disabilities are available at:
www.illinoisworknet.com



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